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I rise today to support the resolution commemorating and celebrating the life of Dorothy Height, a woman of petite stature but enormous presence, and the only woman included among the “Big Six” most renowned civil rights leaders: the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., James Farmer, our own esteemed colleague John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and Dorothy Height.

Dorothy Height exemplified the spirit of democracy like perhaps no one else. The daughter of a building contractor, James Edward Height, and a nurse, Fannie Burroughs Height, she rose to national prominence and leadership from humble beginnings. She was prepared to lead the charge, even when it meant being a lone figure; she was the only woman on the speaker's platform when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his “I Have A Dream” speech. She combated the challenges facing African Americans from every angle; in 1936 in New York, she participated in a protest against lynchings. She advocated an end to segregation in the military, fought for a fairer legal system, and worked to end racial restrictions on access to public transportation. During the 1950s, she worked on voter registration drives in the South.

But she also understood the economic underpinnings of the same challenges. Following her work to achieve major civil rights victories in the 1960s, Height shifted her focus to supporting initiatives aimed at eliminating poverty among southern blacks, such as home ownership

programs and child care centers. Among her more creative efforts, Ms. Height instituted a so-called pig bank, through which poor black families were provided with a pig of their own, a prize commodity in the early 1960s. Despite the violence and dangers of the time, during Height's years as a civil rights activist, she never acquired a reputation as a radical or militant. She simply steadfastly moved forward, seamlessly removing barriers for all who followed.

In a 2001 interview, Height expressed bittersweet feelings for the earlier years of her work, noting that sit-ins and protest marches had been replaced by lobbying for legislation. The power and momentum behind the struggle for desegregation and voting rights had been replaced by the comparative quietude of pursuits for economic opportunity, educational equality, and an end to racial profiling. She asked where the country would be if the ``vigor placed in fighting slavery and in the women's movement had kept pace."

Even without that, her accomplishments and awards fill pages. Height is perhaps best known for her four decades of work with the National Council of Negro Women, the Washington, DC, headquarters of which stands just steps from where slaves were once traded in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol. She has served as advisor on civil rights matters to U.S. Presidents going back to Eisenhower, as well as advising and traveling with programs sponsored by the Council to the White House Conference, UNESCO, the Institute on Human Relations of the American Jewish Committee, USAID, and the United States Information Agency, among other organizations. Her unparalleled contributions to the advancement of women's rights, civil rights, and human rights have earned her dozens of awards including the 1993 NAACP Springarn Medal, a Presidential Medal of Freedom Award, presented by Bill Clinton in 1994, and a Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush in 2004.

In addition, during her lifetime of service, Dr. Height has been presented with more than three dozen honorary degrees, including doctorates from institutions including Tuskegee, Harvard and Princeton Universities. But the one that undoubtedly mattered the most was her receipt of the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in 2004 from Barnard College, 75 years after the College had turned her away because it had already enrolled its quota of two African American females that year.

Dorothy Height was a pillar of the civil rights movement, and will be dearly missed by us all. I am deeply saddened at her passing but everlastingly uplifted by her life's work.